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ABSTRACT

Cultural traits related to experiences of specific ethnic, religious, or racial heritages have received much attention in recent years. There are several broader cultural influences, however, which apply to children of several cultural groups and to teachers. These broader cultural influences color teachers' interpretations of students' behaviors and attitudes and deserve attention before and beyond attention to ethnic influences. The relative value placed on individualism and competition versus group loyalty and cooperation, the influence of locale or place of residence, and, importantly, the influence of social class are such broader influences. Student teachers frequently misinterpret as racial or ethnic those behaviors and attitudes which are in fact determined by social class. Important social class differences exist in attitudes and behaviors related to promptness, orientations toward present and future time, delayed gratification, the idioms and connotations of language, and tolerance for background noise and crowding, all of which have implications for effective instruction. The successful teaching of values unlike the cultural values students are used to requires that teachers understand why their own and their students' values differ. But, when information about the cultural background of a particular group is gained, care must be taken not to assume that all children of that group are alike or necessarily share the typical characteristics of the group. (RH)

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CULTURE BEFORE ETHNICITY

Betsy E. West

Cultural traits related to experiences of specific ethnic, religious, or racial heritages have received much attention in recent years. Many of these traits relate to:

sex role assignments -

whether or not it is "right" to accept directions or reprimands from a female;

treatment of authority figures -

how close one stands,

what posture is expected,

whether or not eye contact is allowed;

acceptable ways of expressing emotion-positive and negative;

extent of the autonomy and power which the cultural group holds or previously held in the society.

If a particular group and a specific place are known, teachers or others dealing with a given cultural group can find helpful information. Teachers and prospective teachers often become annoyed because they want specifics - and if they don't receive a magic wand or a single phrase that will solve problems, they assume "the experts" know nothing. When discussing discipline, for example, they ask questions like "What do you do when the kid puts a rock in the snow ball?" I would reply with a series of questions:

"How old are the children?"

"How have the children been getting along before?"

"How much aggression has been previously tolerated?"

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"Was anyone hurt?" ..... et cetera.

But I also ask:

"Is the teacher's power institutional only or personal?"

"What rapport does the teacher have with the children?"

"How much respect has the teacher earned?"

"What kind of model has the teacher provided?"

I may even ask how often it snows in that locale. But until some specifics of the situation are known, no answer will be rational or appropriate. One can be general about the extremes - don't laugh as if nothing happened and don't call out the marines, but there are at least a hundred different responses between those extremes.

One doesn't expect architects and engineers to decide what kind of foundation is best for a building or bridge until they know the type of soil on which the structure is to be built. Similarly, we who study multiculturalism should not try to give a magic wand or a single phrase for all groups. We can give insights and suggestions about particular groups - we can tell you not to pat Vietnamese on the head, not to expect Hopi or Navajo children to look you in the eye. We can tell you all Blacks aren't musical. We can try to increase awareness about cultural similarities and differences. There are several broader cultural influences, however, which apply to children of several cultural groups and to us as teachers, influences which in fact color the interpretations we make of students' behaviors and attitudes. These deserve our attention before (and beyond) the awareness of ethnic influences.

Individualism and Competition

The United States is a society that verbally glorifies individualism. Please note "verbally." (Footnote: I would recommend to you the essay on this subject in TIME magazine October 15, 1984.) But as we verbalize the ideal of individualism, we reflect one of the value conflicts in our society which was pointed out years ago by Lynd (1939) and others. We glorify individualism - AND we glorify cooperation. Furthermore, we TEACHERS EXPECT BOTH. The problem is that we don't tell children when we expect which and some of them come from groups which have very different expectations about cooperation and individualism.

In Bronfenbrenner's TWO WORLDS OF CHILDHOOD, he describes childrearing and schooling in Russia and the United States. The American scene is familiar. When a child completes his/her work before the rest of the class, the teacher expects him to read silently or go to another activity at a learning station. Those who finish early may earn some extra privilege ("You get to feed the rabbit," or "You may leave first for recess"). In Russia, where most of the elementary schools have desks in rows, Bronfenbrenner says that when a child completes his work, he immediately goes to help another child in his row. An individual child is not given special privileges. He may not go out to recess before others; rather the ROW which finishes first will be allowed to go out first. Our immediate reaction is of course the correct one: The school is reenforcing the cultural values of the society - group loyalty, which for some may become party loyalty later, but it is also cooperation. Yet, most American teachers would consider it cheating if one student went to help another on academic

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work. Our practices reenforce our society's value of individualism, which usually comes to mean competition among or between individuals.

We give children mixed signals about sharing - at home and at school. "Share your toys with your friends - like a nice boy." But when the visiting child breaks an expensive toy, "I told you you'd have to take care of your toys. I know I told you to share, but why did you let him play with that toy?"

At school we expect children to work individually - we have individualized assignments, sometimes individual learning carrels, perhaps the teacher's instructions are even on a tape to which the child listens with individual earphones. We can defend all those techniques pedagogically, but we also expect cooperation--

"Share the equipment on the playground."

"Take your turn in line" - and we have lots of lines in schools!

"You can both play in the house corner," et cetera, et cetera. It is necessary for children to share in dozens of ways, but much of the school is organized so they will not share what we say is the most important part of our schooling, the academic work. Grading systems certainly reenforce individual competition as do many of our classroom management techniques.

A teacher in my graduate class stoutly defended the point that teachers do not deliberately stress competition in schools today. She said, "You must think we still have charts with gold stars by each student's name and we don't!" Of COURSE we don't. Now we have charts with smiling faces or PAC man beside students' names! But they are charts and they do show

a child his relationship to others. Whether that is good or bad depends on one's philosophy of education.

What does this have to do with children from different cultural backgrounds? Simply this: Some children from certain cultural groups have been taught that the group is always more important than the individual - even the individual self, and that it is wrong to draw attention to one's self even by an outstanding achievement. Those children may find a teacher's cultural expectation for individualistic academic work and achievement alien to everything they know. And it may go beyond academics.

A child from a truly communal sub-culture may have only experienced group ownership, so using, even taking crayons or pencil from another is not considered stealing. A child from extreme poverty who may indeed share a coat or shoes with siblings cannot perceive taking another's lunch in the same way that a middle-class child perceives it. It seems sometimes that educators are very selective in what they choose to believe of certain theories. Teachers who enthusiastically preach Piaget seem to forget that he never said that children are born understanding the concepts of private ownership and theft.

An older child may deliberately use the "wrong" exit in order to meet and escort a younger sibling, or he may even interrupt another class to check on a younger brother or sister who may have been seen crying on the playground. Now middle class Anglo Americans KNOW that the younger child has to learn "to stand on his own." We know that the older child should not leave his own class. We may even tell the older child to mind his/her own business. A child reared, for example, in a close-knit Mexican-

American family, however, definitely IS minding his/her own business and he knows family members are more important than anybody's schedules and rules and assignments. And he who may have believed teachers were kind and understanding certainly doesn't understand a teacher's annoyance at such an interruption. A child once said to me, "People say teachers are s'posed to be kind and understanding, but they sure don't understand me." How sadly true that sometimes is.

Public school teachers need feel no special guilt. The value conflict which I've described is not limited to any one level. MANY of the problems between international students at American universities and outstanding professors hinge on this very point of when it is appropriate or permissible to help one's "brother," fellow-national, friend, or classmate.

Locale - whether the child lives in a urban, rural, or suburban area or in which of these he has lived most of his life.

Certainly that affects the child's notion of space. Years ago my husband had a sixth grade student whose family had moved from a tenant farm to the city. He had great trouble adjusting to regulations and any school regime. When the school contacted the parents, they took away his chewing tobacco as punishment. It was a long time before anyone could get Wilbur to express his feelings. When he did, tears came and he tried to explain why he wanted to leave class and go out on the playground when nobody was there. He said, "Aw, Mr. West, there ain't no place in this whole town where you can just throw a rock." He was right.

Years later I remember young Wilbur as I live in a highrise and watch the children dodge pedestrians as they learn to ride bikes. One father

plays ball with his son every night - in a space that MAY be three feet square. That child's expectations of space are different from Wilbur's. As you well know, all urban neighborhoods don't have parks and certainly don't have shopping malls.

If the teacher lives in an area unlike that of his students there may be different perceptions which affect their communications. In Kansas teachers from the city often drive out to teach in small rural communities. In Chicago teachers from the suburbs may drive in to city schools. These teachers and students do not really share a similar culture and if the student is ethnically different, the different locations may accentuate those differences. Regardless of Dick and Jane stories being modernized, how do you explain suburban life to a child who has lived in Hongkong, then perhaps briefly in San Francisco, and now in Chicago or Vancouver?

Not only does the location affect a child's expectation of space, it probably also affects his expectations of noise. The first time I went to Chicago I thought it was exciting to hear the trucks unloading and trash being collected before dawn. On a recent visit to New York, however, I realized that in an entire week there was not one minute, day or night, that there was quiet. Windows closed or not, you could drown out one noise with another, but no quiet - and that included Central Park. One school in Vancouver took a class on a field trip to a mountain so the children could see snow. The East Indian and Chinese children were impressed with the snow, but it was also vast and quiet. That too was a new experience for some of them.

Locale may also affect children's attitude toward strangers. In fact it may determine who is classified as stranger. Those next door or in the next block, next farm, next town? Because of the anonymity of urban life parents teach children not to speak to strangers and tenants of the adjoining apartments are strangers. In contrast, neighbors of a child on a western ranch may be 10 miles away, but the child and his family know all the families in a 25 mile radius and they all speak to each other.

A more obvious aspect of locale is regionalism itself. Each region has different mores, weather, and dialect. The mores are too numerous and varied to mention here, but we all recognize that weather is not the only difference between a farm in Nebraska and one in Georgia. As a college freshman who had never left the South, I had a professor from Boston. Had the text been written as he or I spoke, I would never have passed the course.

There may be effects of locale about which we don't even know. I think of one study which timed the speed of pedestrians crossing the street in towns and cities of different sizes. Those in larger cities walked faster than those in smaller cities. There was a direct correlation. The researchers controlled for weather and time of day, but people in New York walked faster than people in Kansas City and so forth down to very small communities where people walked slowly. Some of our culturally different children have always lived in cities. For others who've always lived in rural areas, any city and its school are alien in every way.

Social Class

A third cultural influence that affects the behaviors and attitudes of our students, our perception of those attitudes and behaviors, and, in fact, our own attitudes and behaviors is social class. Several researchers have found social class to be the strongest variable in determining teachers' attitudes toward students. We in America don't like to talk about social class. It's not institutionalized as it is in some European countries and our forefathers wrote that all men are equal before God and the law. Certainly they were not equal in the eyes of each other, even then (verbal idealism again!). Americans are rightly proud of the egalitarianism our country affords, so we tend to talk about that egalitarianism rather than about social differences. Or if we talk about differences, we talk about racial and ethnic differences which are predetermined. Thus we imply that if the differences between people are because of race or ethnicity, we have no responsibility. It is almost embarrassing and certainly far more dangerous to talk about social class differences because those distinctions are man-made and could be changed - note "could." I see no indication that they will be changed.

Whether or not we want to talk about social class, we all recognize social differences. Sometimes we recognize those differences in our own lives. According to sociological studies, most public school teachers in the United States were reared in working class families. Many of us well remember growing up in smaller homes than we now have, and with fewer conveniences. We know our parents had less schooling than we have. Whether we talk about the proverbial bootstrap pulling or talk about how

hard our parents worked so we could "better" ourselves, in sociological terms, many American teachers are upwardly mobile, and the most common vehicle of mobility has been education itself. Though it is true that teachers do not make as much money as most other Americans with equal higher education, by the time we become teachers - even if we were reared in destitution, we definitely have internalized the middle class mores.

It may be helpful to review a few facts about social class before we go further - facts which are "hard to swallow" sometimes and which are often distorted.

Fact 1. Most Americans are NOT middle class and that has been true since colonial days. Most sociologists divide the society into three classes - upper, middle, and lower, but each class has two sub-classes so we have six sub-classes. Middle class is divided into upper middle and lower middle. Lower class is also divided into upper lower and lower lower, et cetera. Different sociologists may change the labels, but five or six classes are generally accepted.

Fact 2. Most lower class Americans are white - w-h-i-t-e! Not just white, but I expect Protestant and Anglo-Saxon. There are more whites in <u>all</u> social classes of the United States because there are more whites in the society.

Fact 3. Most welfare recipients are white. This is a shocking fact for some.

Fact 4. The labels "middle-class" and "working class" are NOT synonymous. "Working class" is a label (perhaps a euphemism) which refers

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to what sociologists identify as "upper lower class" with perhaps just a few of the lower middle class. I sometimes think "working class" is used by the media so they don't have to say aloud the phrase "lower class." In fairness, however, the government statistics - and therefore, many media stories, are based on income alone and that is only one factor in identifying social class, so the entire use of the word "class" in such reports may be inaccurate.

Now, the fifth fact is the one related to ethnicity.

Fact 5. Each and every cultural group has a social hierarchy of classes within itself in addition to the national over-all social class structure. For example, there are upper-class Spanish-Americans who owned land in the Southwest before it was a part of the United States and who may now be eight or 10 generations from their Spanish culture. There are middle-class Mexican-Americans, there are lower class Mexican Americans. Similar stratification can be found in each and every identifiable ethnic group.

Every identifiable ethnic group has a social class structure within itself. Some of the Americans of the Southwest who are most critical of illegal immigrants from Mexico are those who have been upwardly mobile since their grandparents came from Mexico for some of the same reasons. This illustrates what one might expect. There is very seldom unity within a given minority. Occasionally a great leader can bring together different elements of a minority group. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. was able to do this to some extent during the civil rights movement, but there are still social distances among the social classes of Blacks. Some whites cluck over the fact that Blacks aren't united. Why should they be? Are whites??

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Certainly not, and the basis for the division isn't just political. Often the basis is social class. Upper middle class Blacks are just as uncomfortable about their children becoming friends with lower class Blacks or whites as upper middle class whites are when their children become friends with lower class students of any group.

Currently some teachers wonder why Vietnamese children don't get along with each other. In some cases their parents fought against each other, and we shouldn't forget that. But we should remember also that the early refugees were well educated, mainly from professional and perhaps wealthy families in Vietnam. Some of the later refugees have come from poorer backgrounds, and sometimes were not even literate in their own language. Both groups may have come for political reasons. They may have been equally poor upon arrival; they may be equally deficient in the English language; and, to us, "they may all look alike;" but they and their families certainly know the difference and often do not want the children associating with each other. It's easy for us as Americans to say we don't have time for that kind of pettiness, but we should be very careful. Have you never heard a white American parent cautiously ask the teacher about the kind of friends his/her child has chosen at school? I have, and in schools that were all white. Have you never heard a teacher try to warn a parent, however indirectly, "You may not want Johnny associating with whomever?" Frequently those remarks indicate perceptions of social class distinctions.

Because some minorities are more visible than others and some minorities do have disproportionate numbers in the lower class (but "disproportionate" does not make a majority) because of economic, political,

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and social factors beyond their control, teachers - indeed it sometimes seems most teachers - grossly generalize about them as a group. When we as teachers see a large number of a given minority who are in the lower class, we too often generalize that all children of that group are lower class, or slow, or disruptive, or whatever our impressions are of the group. Then when we see a child who doesn't fit that generalization, we present him as the exception. How many teachers have said, "He's really ambitious for a Black," or "He's just plain lazy - not like other Chinese students."

Every community has a pecking order of minorities. Those lowest in that order are usually the most recently arrived immigrants. When we hear recent immigrants downgraded, we should bear in mind that one hundred years ago - even a few years less than a hundred - there were signs in the windows of restaurants in Boston which said "No dogs or Irish allowed."

It is my observation that the student behaviors which drive us teachers "up the wall" are most frequently those behaviors which sociologists have found occur more frequently in lower classes. We don't call them lower class behaviors. We talk about "those children." The antecedent varies with the locale, but it's those children about whom we say:

"They're so loud..."

"They disrupt everything..."

"Their parents don't care..."

"They won't even try..."

"They're never on time..."

"I know this sounds terrible, but they really do smell."

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I often challenge student teachers when they go into the schools to choose the most unpleasant child, the one whom they really wish wasn't there, and then tell me which of his behaviors bother them. If the child is a minority child, they frequently begin with a generalization about people of that culture. "I guess Vietnamese children (or Black or Mexican-Americans) are like that, but..." In 99% of the cases, the behaviors they describe have nothing to do with ethnicity or race, but are behaviors which, according to sociologists' documentation, occur more frequently among lower class families than among middle class ones.

Communication specialists talk about a communication gap, psychologists talk about dissonance, anthropologists talk about cultural values and cultural conflict. Whichever jargon is used, it should not be surprising that people who have internalized the values of the middle class, such as we teachers, have great difficulty accepting the behaviors and attitudes found among the lower class-both children and adults. I am not suggesting that some of those middle class values should not be taught. Certainly since Thomas Mann the schools have been charged with perpetuating the dominant values of the society and teaching the younger generations to conform to those values. If in good conscience, teachers decide certain behaviors are necessary for the child's development and welfare, not just for institutional convenience, then we should teach those behaviors. For example, if some respect for promptness on the job isn't learned, people won't be able to hold a job in this society. But middle class members are fanatics about promptness on everything - and we have ulcers to prove it. If we want to be successful at teaching selected values unlike the cultural

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values children are used to, our best strategy is to understand "where the children are coming from" - why they have such different values, habits or attitudes...and why we have the ones we have. This is not the attitude of a bleeding heart paternalist who thinks "those poor dear minority children" probably can't do the work so teachers should let them slide by. I only point out that the middle class child has had years of preparation to meet teachers' expectations, and the lower class child may need more practice and different motivation and reenforcement in order to meet the same goals.

What are these ominous lower class behaviors to which I've referred? Let us list a few, even if the limitations of this article don't allow a discussion of the reasons. Promptness has already been alluded to. Downs (1975) says we give moral value to things that are vital to a society's survival. In a technological society, precise timing is vital. But we don't awaken our children at age three and tell them they have to learn to be prompt so they can function in a technological society. Rather, we tell them "it's not nice to keep people waiting," or that "people will stare if we come in church late." We attribute moral worth to promptness and we as teachers then see it as wrong if students don't share our attitude about promptness. Promptness is important - for those who work. If a person is unemployed and has been to the employment office daily for four weeks without getting a job, does it really matter whether he is there promptly at nine or 11:15? Experience will have taught that either is useless. Promptness is almost irrelevant to the unemployed. That is one of the reasons several minority groups have jokes about American time or white folks' time.

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Certainly middle class children are also late at times, but the middle class, particularly the upper middle class child, knows he's late and he may be giving a message. The message may be that he hates the teacher or that the classroom activities are boring, but the lower class child may truly be less aware of time. All lower class children do not have watches. More important, they haven't been surrounded with people for whom precise timing was crucial - catching the bus, meeting the deadline, punching the clock, making cocktail hour. The middle class child has already learned from those patterns.

Another aspect of time relates to its orientation. Middle class people are future oriented. We live for the future, planning and saving for vacation, house remodeling, children's education, retirement, whatever. We are the ones who buy insurance for the future. And we confidently say "the purpose of schooling is to prepare the child for life," by which we mean future life. We say that to thousands of children in this nation who think they're living now. We spend so much time worrying and planning and living for the future, we often spoil the present and realize too late that we've missed the pleasures and satisfactions of life.

In contrast, lower class people are more likely to be present oriented. For some cultural groups, this may relate to religious beliefs, but for many it may simply be a coping mechanism. If one knows that the future is likely to be worse than the present because that has happened so frequently, a bird in hand is better than the one in the bush. Live in the present and cherish whatever satisfactions can be found! There's no point in worrying about tomorrow because you have no control over it. Notice this feeling

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of lack of control isn't the universal feeling that none of us know what will happen tomorrow, but rather that they as people have no power over their own lives, to determine anything about tomorrow.

Part of future time orientation is delayed gratification. Middle class parents teach that early. "Eat your vegetables and you can have dessert." "Take your nap and we'll go to the park." "Your allowance is a quarter, but 10¢ goes in Sunday School, 10¢ goes in your piggie bank." The child knows he only gets five cents for an allowance. But he can save those pennies and buy a balloon, or a bike later - or later still, a car. Most lower class children have had neither the models nor the training for future orientation, yet we in schools both teach it and expect it. Lesson plans, class schedules, almost every activity of the school day is presented in terms of future consequences: We want to get the classroom decorated before parents' night. We want to finish this section before the weekend.

Many times I have self righteously said to secondary English classes on the first day of school, "We have to write a research paper this year and so you can get a head start and plan your time (you see, I knew I was teaching them to organize their time!), I'm going to give you the schedule today and then I won't mention the deadlines again because you're grownup and old enough to be responsible. You will hand in your topic three weeks from today. Your notecards will be due October 20. Your outline will be handed in on November 1. Your rough draft is due the day before Thanksgiving and then the final draft will come in before the Christmas holiday." I was so organized. We did all kinds of drills that I knew taught them the skills necessary to accomplish those assignments. I don't pretend

that middle class children didn't wait until the night before to do some of those assignments. They certainly did, but even if they waited, they knew when they were due. They had had 12 or 13 years watching parents keep calendars on the wall by the phone to put down appointments and activities months in advance. On October 20 when students were shuffling the notecards and passing them in, someone in the back of the room would say, "I didn't know they were due today. I ain't got'em, Mrs. West." "Oh, but I told you on the first day of school." "The first day? Aw, Mrs. West, how'd I know when you wanted them cards? You ain't mentioned 'em since the first day." As I said, different motivations, different reenforcements may be necessary for different children.

Teachers should remember that grades themselves are an example of delayed gratification. Students hear, "You must learn to read well because there's a lot of reading from fourth grade on," "Study hard now and make good grades because they really count in junior high," "You better make good grades now because they count real units in high school," "You have to have good grades in high school or you can't get in college." If a child knows he's not going to get more education, why does he need good grades?

I had a student teacher who worked her heart out to motivate some boys. She met with them after school, she responded to their interests, she tried everything. Then one day she said, "I'm sorry, I'm just going to have to give you D's." They responded, "So what? We always get 'D's' and 'F's." To the middle class teacher, it may be a tragedy that they saw no future worth working for but perhaps the tragedy is that the school curriculum

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was so irrelevant to their lives. It is also an indictment of our teacher education programs that that poor young teacher not only didn't realize there are students to whom grades are unimportant, she had no idea why grades were unimportant to those boys.

In addition to different time orientations, there are language differences among the social classes. Those differences aren't just grammar but idioms and connotations. Several years ago I took my college classes to high schools to look for social class differences. They were not to go into the classrooms. They could go to the lunchroom, restrooms, parking lot, gymnasium, where the kids went to sneak a smoke, any place but the classroom because then they'd watch teachers rather than students. One day when the final bell rang for a class I was on one side of the courtyard and one of my students was on the other side. Between us was a couple who ignored the bell. All nonverbal indications were that they were lower class as were 98% of the students in that school. The couple were in deep and serious conversation. About three minutes after the bell rang, the girl tossed her head and flounced off. The boy plunged his hands deep in his pockets and moped toward a class. It was an open classroom so my student and I could follow and observe without entering the class. By then it was 6 or 7 minutes after the final bell but the teacher was calling the roll. As the boy took a seat at the rear of the room, the teacher stopped calling the roll and began her tirade. "John, I told you not to come to this class late again. I'm so sick and tired of your being late, I don't know what to do. I told you I was going to send you to the office if you were late again." John was stretched out in his chair, still quite depressed. He

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looked up and said very quietly, "Aw, get off my my back, baby." At that point, the teacher slammed the attendance book closed and grabbed a referral slip, saying, "That does it. You get out of this class and I hope you never come back. You go to the dean's office right now." John took the note and left. I knew the dean at the school and later asked him what John's punishment was. He said, "That was the strangest case. Do you know what happened?" I said I had seen him sent out of the room. Handing me the note, he said "John's always late, but he'd never do anything like this." The note said that John was sent to the office for making obscene and suggestive comments to the teacher. Believe me, if that lower class young man had been propositioning that middle class teacher, she wouldn't have understood the terms. Originally the point of contention was tardiness, but the different use of the term "baby" was added insult to that teacher.

Another characteristic related to social class is that lower class children are likely to have a greater tolerance for background noise and crowding. They may not consider low-level noise an interruption. People of lower economic backgrounds usually have to live in crowded situations. There simply isn't a quiet place to study or daydream or hide if there are eight people living in three rooms. But middle class teachers want absolute and total quiet, at least while we give instructions. And we "know" we are giving pearls of wisdom that will undoubtedly affect the future of every child in the room. We also know it's rude to speak when someone else is talking so in a sense the student who continues to talk while we speak is insulting us. Some inexperienced teachers try to stare down the talker or wait for silence. I remember one student who looked up at me

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and said, "Go ahead, Mrs. West. I ain't bothering you - I'm just talking to Mike." From his point of view, he wasn't drowning me out, so he wasn't bothering me. My point of view was different.

There are many other differences of social classes, but the point we must remember is that some behaviors and attitudes which teachers attribute to a culturally different child may in fact be social class differences. We should watch ourselves and remember there are multiple social classes within each cultural group.

Some have said contact with the culturally different does little to minimize prejudice; it is contact with the culturally different who are social equals that helps. Only then do people begin to see each other as individuals. If this be true, it behooves us as teachers to arrange circumstances so the students interact as equals. If ethnically different children are in the lowest reading group and those groups are used for all activities, the teacher may in fact be reenforcing stereotypes learned from television and the larger society.

Ponder these cultural differences which precede and go beyond ethnic differences. By observing and questioning we teachers ourselves can find the necessary information about the specific cultural heritage of the children we teach. We must not ask the student or parents themselves except in the most gentle and indirect way, but ask reference librarians, museum staffs, social workers, professors - ask everybody, read to find the answers, but find them. We need to ask questions about authority, about family structure, about how emotions are expressed, about sex role assignments, about the history of their people at least in the past hundred years, about

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their religion, holidays, art and music. We should ask about legends and folklore of their country or ethnic background. Some parents who want their children to assimilate quickly sometimes resent a teacher's showing interest in the music, art and food of their land, but they frequently are flattered when asked to share a story they enjoyed as a child.

One final caution: When information about the cultural background of a particular group is gained, we must be careful not to assume all children of that group are alike or necessarily share the typical characteristics of the group. A Chinese-American child who is third generation American in a city without an identifiable Chinese community will probably not share the cultural characteristics of a Chinese-American who is reared in San Francisco. An American Indian in Baltimore may never have seen an Indian reservation. Similarly students of a given group may not know about their own cultural history. I once had a high school class of Blacks of whom none had ever heard of Malcolm X.

We teachers must remember that each student, regardless of ethnicity, religion, or race, is first and foremost an individual. It is our responsibility to educate all the children but it is also our responsibility to educate all the children about all the children. We should see our students as individuals and as individuals from different cultures. The model we provide of respecting the culturally different students may be the most important thing we ever teach.

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